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ABSTRACT

In addition to personal and social consequences, school failure among Member States of the European Community is a major economic liability. Member States have used a variety of measures to counter school failure. It is generally agreed that socioeconomic, cultural, and personal factors all contribute to school failure. Indicators of school failure include internal measures, such as repetition of grade levels, examination results, and dropping out, as well as external measures, such as postcompulsory schooling activities, illiteracy, and youth unemployment. Structural changes designed to combat school failure include more flexible timetables and school routines, preschool programs, lengthening compulsory schooling, and reducing gaps between levels of schooling. Flexibility and diversification of curricula, increased basic learning, better dissemination of knowledge, more-well-defined assessment, and guidance are teaching-oriented reforms used by Member States. School-based measures include stronger administrative roles, greater school autonomy, partnerships, and enhanced school life. Improvement can also come in teacher training, educational organization, and connections with the community. Help for students' families includes increasing family support and encouraging involvement in education. The pupil can be helped through specialized teaching, early detection of learning difficulties, tutoring, and afterschool assistance. (JPT)

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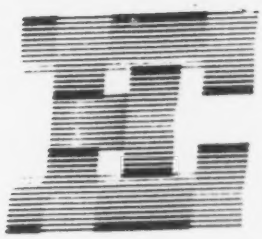

Eurydice

Measures to fight school failure in the Member States of the European Community

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Summary report

prepared by the EURYDICE European Unit for

the meeting of senior officials

in June 1992

under the Portuguese presidency

EA 024 683

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FOREWORD

The present document was drawn up by the EURYDICE European Unit, which assumes full responsibility for its content. The main objective of this summary report is to present a catalogue of approaches and strategies used in the Member States of the European Community to fight school failure, without taking any position as to their pertinence. To this end, the report is based primarily on the answers received to two questions circulated in the EURYDICE network in 1990 and 1991. Furthermore, two comparative studies were taken into account in a subsidiary manner: one financed by the Commission of the European Communities and the other conducted by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of the OECD. (For bibliographical details, see annex 1.)

On first reflection it might have appeared desirable to include figures on the extent of school failure in the Community Member States. However, a closer examination of the available data calls for the greatest caution in this area. Only a couple of the Member States have statistics of this type and, even where available, these data tend to be based on indicators so highly divergent as to prohibit their use in a comparative report.

MEASURES TO FIGHT SCHOOL FAILURE

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I INTRODUCTION

1. Education must take up the new challenges posed by an advanced technology and a troubled economy. It is now plagued by a persistent malaise: school failure. Apart from its personal and social consequences, school failure ranks as a major economic liability for society. It is for this reason that school failure is the prime educational concern of some Member States. The heated debate arising out of the subject of school failure reveals a need to rethink certain aspects of existing education systems. With this in mind, precise quantitative and qualitative goals have been defined. National study groups have been implemented to consider the phenomenon of school failure, the validity of the existing structures, and the remedies to be applied.

2. The status of each person involved in the act of education - from the head teacher to the family - was reviewed and a material and psychological enhancement of the role of the teacher shown to be necessary. Improved consideration of the individual needs of each pupil has helped to refocus the dynamics of the learning process. The importance of greater family involvement in this process is being increasingly recognized.

3. The relationship between the education system and other sectors of society has been highlighted. There are clear links and interactions between certain policies and the problem of school failure. The Member States have responded with a wide range of measures aimed not only at the school system but also at other sectors which influence education. In this way, many Member States stressed the need for a global approach to the problem of school failure.

4. Consequently, a formidable battery of specific measures aimed at reducing school failure has been established. The objectives and scope of these measures differ according to how the problem is presented. Indeed, education systems differ from one Member State to the next, meaning that school failure is understood in different ways. The overlapping of actions to combat school failure highlights the interaction and links between these actions at various levels of the education system.

5. It should be stressed that the subject of our study is the fight against school failure. This should not be taken to include the fight against social inequality, as confusion in this regard could be prejudicial to the very success of the actions undertaken to combat school failure, a confusion which nevertheless underlies some of our documentary sources. It is the fight against social inequality and not the fight against school failure which have given rise to compensatory strategies and positive discrimination (such as the educational priority area). The democratic ideal prevailing in the Member States means that everyone should be given the same chance to integrate, whatever their social or cultural background, physical abilities, etc. Since ideal conditions of equal opportunity for all those facing the same challenges have not been achieved, social inequality should be offset by positive actions, i.e. by giving more to

those who have less. In this way, social equality for all, a fundamental concept in democratic societies, can be re-established in the face of various social challenges: schooling, employment, politics, etc.

A. THE DEFINITION OF SCHOOL FAILURE

1° Difficult and variable definitions

6. School failure is difficult to define since the concept covers a wide variety of actual situations and also because the education systems differ as to their objectives and practices. In fact, there is a close relationship between the definition of school failure and the organization of the education system, the goals assigned to it and the evaluation and assessment procedures adopted.
Some Member States offer no definition of school failure, since it is felt that the concept does not exist in their educational structure.

7. In some Member States school failure is grouped together with other phenomena affecting young people (violence, drugs, marginalization, etc.).

8. Sometimes the very term "school failure" is not used, with preference being shown for a concept which expresses the pupil's failure to realize his or her individual potential.

2° Relative and subjective definitions

9. The way in which school failure is presented depends on how the problem is approached. By viewing the issue from the perspective of the pupil, school or society, other definitions and, therefore, other remedies are found. It is difficult to settle on a clear definition of the issue due to its relative and subjective nature. School failure has been presented in various subjective ways, depending not only on the Member State but also on the various individuals involved in the school system (pupils, parents, teachers, etc.).

B. DECISIVE FACTORS BEHIND FAILURE

10. Determining the causes of school failure, often mentioned in special studies or in the work of study groups, does not readily figure among the measures proposed to combat school failure. In general, only specific means of action are proposed.

1° Socio-economic and cultural factors

11. Most of the Member States feel that socio-economic and cultural factors may, in part, be the causes of failure. This concept is used to designate the determining factors related to background: status, social function of the individual, educational and professional level of the parents, sources of income, types of

living area, lifestyles, nutritional and cultural factors, etc. Furthermore, certain variables come into play with regard to the above-mentioned factors: the type of school, gender, urban or rural environment, etc. Some Member States feel that starting to work at an early age is a major cause of school failure by virtue of the symptoms of overwork, fatigue and the lack of concentration it causes in children.

2° Personal factors in failure

12. School failure becomes apparent at certain ages. By identifying these age levels, we can implement more suitable measures. Hence, most of the Member States make special efforts at the following stages: around 6-7 years of age, when basic learning - mainly language - is taking place; at 11-12 years, the pre-pubescent period and a common time to change schools; at 15-16 years, during the crisis years of adolescence, and a time when compulsory schooling is generally completed.

3° Failure of the system?

13. The special attention often paid to personal factors by the Member States does not mean that they believe these to be the only - or principal - cause. School failure has also been dealt with in the strict sense of the term, namely failure of the school and the entire education system. The unsatisfactory structure of the system itself has therefore been implicated in some Member States: over-centralization, interruptions in the development of schooling, overly restrictive assessment methods, insufficient pedagogical training of teachers, unsuitability of certain teaching practices, class size, the homogeneous or heterogeneous nature of classes, inappropriate school routines, etc.

School failure often arises out of the interaction of several factors. Whether any given factor is the subject of special attention in the fight against school failure depends on the ideological and educational debate inherent to the national cultures and traditions underlying the education system.

C. INDICATORS USED TO DETECT FAILURE

14. There are no common references on this subject, especially since this involves a variety of school systems which reflect different national cultures, and therefore imbues the very concept of school failure with an extreme degree of relativity. The factors which serve as indicators in the Member States are either internal or external to the school. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the indicators of failure which emerge from the answers received from the Eurydice National Units all concern the pupil's lack of adaptation, even when they also point out malfunction in the school system.

1° Internal indicators

Internal indicators not only reveal situations of school failure, but also illustrate the orientations of a school system.

15. **a)** Repeating: while repetition of a school year is unheard of in some Member States, others use it quite regularly or at certain levels. The general trend reveals a tendency to limit repetition of a year which, although it can be used to treat difficulties, is nevertheless perceived as a failure.

16. **b)** Examination results (for advancement and at the end of schooling): the different roles played by examinations from one country to another should be emphasized. Generally speaking, for most Member States examinations are a means of checking whether cognitive objectives have been achieved. These results determine whether pupils will advance into the next class, or into the next level, and allow qualifications to be awarded. In certain systems, the examination has an orientation function among the various streams. The current trend is to reduce the number of examinations during compulsory schooling and to replace them with forms of continuous assessment. However, even where examinations are not compulsory, they exert an influence on the continuation of studies and the search for employment and are therefore an important part of the pupil's personal assessment.

17. **c)** Division into streams: depending on the Member State, organization into streams takes place at different times in schooling or not at all during compulsory education. This organization reveals differences in ability among pupils. It governs access to education and training after compulsory education. Furthermore, the very fact that one is oriented towards vocational streams is often considered an indicator of school failure.

18. **d)** "Falling behind" (retard scolaire): this indicator concerns falling behind with respect to an established standard, as a correlation between the age of the pupil and the year of study. Repetition of a year is one cause of falling behind, but a pupil may lag behind his peers even if he has never repeated a year (slow learning in nursery school following the discovery of a difficulty, late entry into primary school because of illness, etc.).

19. **e)** Truancy: this indicator reflects a discomfort at school, but may have another meaning in a rural environment. The correlation between the truancy rate and the size of the school should be emphasized.

20. **f)** Dropping out: this is the rejection of school by those who, for the most part, feel excluded by it. Some Member States closely monitor compliance with compulsory schooling. Most, however, are aware of the ineffectiveness of repressive measures. Dropping out has a different significance depending on whether it is in an urban or rural area.

21. g) Personal feeling: pupils may feel that they are in a failure situation even though there is no evidence of any of the above-mentioned indicators.

2° External indicators

22. a) What happens to pupils after compulsory schooling: this indicator takes on different meanings depending on the effort expended on training by the Member State. If training has been developed to such an extent that it can enable everyone to receive an advanced level of schooling, this indicator can be a valid measure of failure. On the other hand, if training is developed unsatisfactorily, it does not measure failure but rather gaps in policy.

23. b) Difficulties with occupational integration: such difficulties are often a reflection of school failure.

24. c) Unemployment among young people: this commonly used indicator implicates the lack of employment and the ineffective coordination between training schemes and market demands, rather than the education system itself.

25. d) Working at an early age among young people: this is both a cause and an indicator of school failure.

26. e) Illiteracy, resurgent illiteracy: this indicator measures different things depending on whether or not it is used by a country which is highly developed in economic terms.

27. f) Delinquency, drug abuse: the use of this indicator justifies the strengthening of measures implemented in or around the school to enable schooling to proceed in a peaceful environment.

II STRATEGIES OF INTERVENTION

A. STRUCTURAL POLICIES

1° The school

a) Introduction of flexible mechanisms

28. - **School routine:** an unbalanced division between work and leisure time in the day, week, and year can have a negative influence on pupils; Member States have altered routines in their schools which they felt were inappropriate to the children's needs.

29. - **More flexible timetables:** greater flexibility enables the school system to adapt the organization of education to the local environment: for example, by introducing independent work periods, thematic or methodological workshops. This is how, in some Member States, the traditional concept of nursery school and primary classes tends to disappear as their functions are organized into cycles of education.

b) Generalization of schooling

30. - **Development of pre-school education:** all the Member States acknowledge the crucial importance to improved child development of the first years of learning. In general terms, this type of education exists. It is either optional or (more rarely) integrated into the first year of compulsory schooling.
Those Member States in which pre-school education is still in its infancy emphasize the adaptation of reception classes to accommodate a greater number of children from the age of 3 years.
The general objective of all the Member States is to reach very high levels of pre-school attendance among children 4 and 5 years of age.
The documentation gives little indication as to the training of teachers or the content and methods of learning at this level. One Member State recently adopted provisions giving nursery schools an official educational status. In this way, nursery schools have specific objectives to achieve by applying methodological and didactic tools suitable for this level of learning.

31. - **Extending the duration of compulsory schooling:** the age at which compulsory education should begin gave rise to much debate. The commonly accepted idea is to integrate the pupil as early as possible into compulsory education in order to reduce the risks of failure. Generally speaking, compulsory schooling begins at 6 years of age, but some Member States have set the age of entry at 5 years and others at 7 years. Compulsory education ends between 14 years, especially in the less economically developed Member States, and 18 years of age.

c) Reducing the number of gaps

The current trend consists of reducing the number of gaps between

the different classes and cycles of compulsory education, as well as between the different schools. In the Member States, this trend is reflected by:

32. Transition structures, which provide a gradual and less abrupt transition between the different levels of education, especially in the initial stages of learning. These structures take the form of kindergarten classes, reception classes for new pupils, "decelerated" classes in primary school where children follow the curriculum of the first year in two years or the curriculum of the first two years in three years, adjustment classes in secondary education to stop gaps in the knowledge of pupils advancing from primary education, and orientation classes set up prior to secondary education;

33. The development of a common core syllabus and the organization of education into cycles;

34. The limitation of selection levels. This is the case with the elimination of examinations required to advance from primary to secondary education. Automatic advancement from one class to the next is widespread, even though some Member States still resort to enforced repetition of a year;

35. A single body of teachers which accompanies the pupils throughout their compulsory schooling. This measure is found mainly in those systems which favour individualized education and a common-core syllabus throughout compulsory schooling.

2° Teaching

a) Flexibility and diversification of curricula

36. In most Member States, these measures attempt to adapt the content of education (primary or secondary) to the various groups at which it is aimed. These measures are more or less widespread depending on the extent of centralization within the Member States. Member States with a low degree of centralization leave the responsibility of curricula and teaching objectives in the hands of the local authorities.

37. In systems where there is a national curriculum, decentralizing developments have been implemented to adapt the system to the pupils' specific requirements. Some national curricula merely serve as indicators, but assign general objectives to be achieved. Teachers have considerable autonomy in organizing their teaching activities. This allows for open and flexible curricula. This flexibility may go hand in hand with reduced curricula.

38. In the eyes of the Member States, introducing diversified options after the common-core syllabus is justified by the need to respond better to differences in the ability levels of pupils. The introduction of these options takes place at a more or less early stage, depending on the Member State. The existence of a common-core syllabus throughout the duration of compulsory educa-

tion is preferred by those education systems which are entirely focused on the child.

b) Basic learning

39. Most of the Member States emphasize the learning of basic knowledge, such as mathematics and language, at the primary level. A variety of teaching methods is used to facilitate and improve such learning. A child who knows how to manage his or her own learning is better equipped to succeed. While acknowledging the importance of these methods, the Member States draw few practical inferences from them. One of the Member States instructs pupils in working methods at secondary level with a view to fostering the optimal development of their capabilities.

c) Better dissemination of knowledge

40. Schools are no longer alone in disseminating knowledge. To face up to this situation as best they can, schools are putting together teaching tools and methods which aim to encourage learning and develop the potential of each pupil. Alternating training in industry is being adopted more and more at secondary level. This type of teaching is favoured by most Member States in their fight against school failure. Emphasis should also be placed on the correlation between a better dissemination of knowledge and adequate training for teachers in terms of both teaching and academic qualifications.

d) Assessment

41. Assessment procedures and tools differ depending on whether the education system focuses on cognitive requirements or individual development and well-being.

42. Assessment follows from the rather large-scale decentralization and autonomy of schools and teachers. In those Member States where the assessment system is characterized by the absence of a clearly defined standard, by the local level of assessment and by abnormally high requirements in certain classes, failure becomes apparent at the time of assessment. This is why intervening action is taken at this level. Preference is given to assessment with respect to the acquisition of skill thresholds rather than with respect to the level of the class. This allows pupils to get involved in the assessment and makes it possible to respect their individual pace and style of learning.
This type of assessment requires that teachers be familiarized with the use of special tools and methods (modules, credit units, profiles, overviews of results, records of individual skills, etc.).

e) Guidance

43. Assistance in finding and choosing appropriate academic and vocational training is valuable for a pupil in a failure situation. This is why the Member States take care in organizing their guidance schemes. While the function may vary from one Member State to the next, the fact remains that the professionals involved (who vary depending on the country: school and careers guidance service, psychologist, teacher, professional with some training in psychology, education and economics) all play a role in the choice of the pupil's academic career and his transition to working life.

44. In education systems which focus more on enabling individuals to realize their full potential, guidance is an integral part of the school curriculum. Appropriate courses allow the pupil to become familiar with his capabilities and to map out his academic career according to the possibilities available. Furthermore, industrial training periods are often organized during the guidance process to initiate the pupil into the working world.

45. In Member States which focus more on the cognitive aspect of education, the concern is to multiply the number of opportunities available to cross over between the general, technical and vocational streams in order to improve the guidance given to pupils (reorientation courses).

C. LIAISON WITH OTHER SECTORS AND PARTNERS

1° Intervention in other sectors

46. In Member States with the least developed education systems, emphasis is placed on providing medical and nutritional assistance to pupils in schools having a high failure rate.

47. Child labour has either been banned or is subject to special provisions, in view of its close correlation with school failure.

48. A variety of measures come into play where employment is concerned. In fact, partnership networks exist between industry and the local authorities in the area of employment and youth training. There are also local agencies which promote and coordinate links between the various socio-economic and political partners regarding young people's access to the labour market, and local bodies which coordinate industrial placements and centralize all training opportunities in local companies. Sometimes, local infrastructures have been set up to coordinate training and employment.

2° Measures for general intervention

49. These involve global, coordinated actions in which the school is viewed as an introduction to the socio-cultural and economic environment. These measures include adapting education by introducing approaches to teaching which are more suitable to new

demographic realities, measures to enhance the support, autonomy and decentralization of schools, active partnership networks with various sectors of society, actions between schools, increased family involvement, etc. Generally speaking, this type of approach is found in local experimental actions (e.g. educational areas and cultural schools) or in specific national curricula such as priority areas. This type of measure is not widespread, even though it does exist in most Member States in one form or another.

3° Parallel networks

50. In most Member States, there are parallel structures at local level which take part in the fight against school failure. In particular, these include various associations which organize holiday courses or "homework schools" to help pupils with learning difficulties. Literacy or remedial courses for young people who have received little schooling are set up. Associations are then responsible for integrating unqualified young people into working life. The importance of the social and educational work carried out in certain locally based youth centres should be stressed. These centres combine guidance, remedial schooling, and vocational preparation. As some local experiments have demonstrated, the value of activities carried out by social workers - such as organizers of open environment activities or social outreach teachers - should not be overlooked in the fight against school failure.

III SPECIFIC MEASURES

A. THE SCHOOL

School failure not only concerns individual pupils, it also and above all affects entire classes and schools. It is therefore a problem of general interest which calls for action to be taken at school level.

1° Adapting the school to its environment:

a) Strengthening the role of head teacher

51. The head teacher is often viewed as playing a key role in the education process. Strengthening his function goes hand in hand with an improved interaction between the school and the external and internal environments. He is therefore given extra resources and powers so that he may successfully carry out his tasks.

b) Autonomy of schools

52. In general terms, there is a noticeable expansion of schools' margin for action. In Member States where there is considerable autonomy, curriculum planning and teaching methods are the responsibility of the school. General objectives and those relating to each subject are set at national level, but schools may decide how these aims and objectives will be achieved. This facilitates the process of taking into consideration the diversity of pupils.

53. In some Member States, school autonomy revolves around a whole school policy, which is an expression of the education and teaching policy that a school chooses to follow with respect to its restrictions, resources, and the learning difficulties encountered by pupils.

54. This room for manoeuvre allows schools not only to engage in self-evaluation, but also to use special methods and tools to assess pupils. Moreover, this autonomy allows schools to adopt a specific strategy for reducing school failure which is better suited to their population.

c) Partnership

The autonomy of a school fosters its openness towards the outside world. Most of the Member States have partnership networks which provide links with the world outside the school.

55. School management frequently involves the participation of a collegial body. Depending on the Member State, this body is comprised of representatives of staff, parents and pupils, as well as representatives of trade union organizations and local elected officials (school governing boards).

56. Information and experience are exchanged between schools of identical or different levels and types of training. Cultural and sports exchanges are carried out with various associations.

57. The training and occupational integration of young people are the subject of strong partnerships with local government and the economic sector:

- at the level of joint actions to fight school failure between **schools and the local authority** (financed in some Member States by a local fund subsidized by the national authorities);

- between schools and various **vocational training organizations** for young people (by means of agreements, for example);

- between schools and **industry**: for the organization of pupil or teacher training placements, association with special apprenticeship programmes offered by the school or with programmes for re-entry into the workforce or for funding pilot projects.

58. Partnership with the pupil's family has been developed to varying degrees in the different Member States. The current trend is to increase family involvement in school life - whether in groups or individually - through school or extracurricular activities. Information on the school and schooling are sent to the pupil's family, and formal or informal contacts with the teaching staff are organized by the school.

d) Organization of school life

A warm, relaxed framework facilitates the educational process. To this end, the Member States have taken action in accordance with their main concerns.

59. In order to overcome defects in physical surroundings, a major effort has been made to **renovate** and modernize **school premises**, as well as to erect new buildings.

60. Emphasis is placed on **welcoming the pupils at the beginning of the school year** (providing information, introducing pupils to school life, etc.) in order to integrate them better into their school. (This may have positive repercussions on truancy). Open days are also organized.

61. The presence of an **ombudsman** for each year of study enables conflicts between pupils and the school to be settled.

62. To overcome the **violence** prevailing both inside and outside schools, some institutions are endeavouring to set up a dialogue between the members of the school community (head teacher, teachers, pupils, families). Other schools have set up a student council in each class which is responsible for disciplinary matters.

63. **Truancy** is a real plague in some Member States. As it is extremely difficult to implement economic sanctions to combat this phenomenon, preventive measures are preferred. These measures include awareness campaigns, the dissemination of information to families by schools in conjunction with external agents, and the granting of financial aid aimed at combating truancy caused by

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economic problems. Furthermore, the traditional measure of notifying the family of any unexcused absence is adopted by some schools which have set up computerized systems for this purpose. Local experiments have created "dialogue areas" (itinerant buses, etc.) to help truant pupils.

64. Some schools include **guidance** as part of their educational task. This involves a wide range of information on training programmes, the successful dissemination of this information, and efforts to provide counselling which can effectively present educated and informed options.

65. **Teacher training** is one of the key factors in combating school failure. Some schools have become closely involved in this process. Depending on the degree of autonomy awarded to them, these schools set up special authorities to coordinate training, organize industrial placements for their teachers, or even manage local funds to pay for teacher training and improved working conditions.

66. As regards **teaching**, the use of innovative approaches (alternating training, projects, etc.), modern technology (computers, etc.), less selective assessment tools (credit units, modules, pupil profiles, etc.), and the organization of team teaching are all strongly encouraged by most Member States in favour of focusing their education system on the pupil.
Alongside the traditional schools are so-called "alternative" schools, which have been in existence for various periods of time depending on the Member State concerned. These alternative schools promote special educational theories whose common denominator is that they concentrate far more on individual development than on the cognitive aspects of learning (Freinet, Montessori, Decroly, Steiner, etc.). In particular, these schools encourage the development of individual potential.

67. **The integration of young people**: schools implement a variety of actions aimed at the social and occupational integration of young people. In most cases, they are centred on a project method approach (cooperative project, company project, etc.) and on alternating training schemes with industry.

- This involves a **specific task for the school**. In this case, the school is responsible for the occupational guidance and integration of young people upon completion of school, whatever their level (access to initial training for unqualified young people, an industrial placement which encourages occupational integration).

- This includes **purely local experiments**: individualized projects for occupational integration in association with the local authorities; the creation of school cooperatives; the opening of schools in the neighbourhood (which become centres for meeting and training).

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B. THE TEACHER

The role of the teacher is of crucial importance in the process of reducing school failure. The current trend in the Member States favours enhancing the financial and social status of the teaching profession. Emphasis is placed on improving the working life of teachers.

1° Training

68. Depending on the Member State, **initial teacher training** focuses to a certain degree on school problems. Some training programmes address the difficulties arising from basic learning. In rarer cases there are special qualifications for dealing with problems at school (in one Member State, teachers responsible for providing support to pupils with learning difficulties have special qualifications). Throughout initial training, special efforts to make pupils aware of the problems of drug addiction in school and of dropping-out are sometimes organized in those Member States where these phenomena are widespread.
In Member States where education is called on to play a major role in providing guidance, teachers receive special training in psychology and educational science.

69. Less frequent are training programmes which emphasize **special teaching methods for nursery schools**, although every Member State acknowledges the decisive importance of the first years of learning (current reforms in one Member State aim to enhance the status of nursery school teachers by giving greater importance to examinations of teaching ability during training).

70. **In-service training** for teachers is not a major concern in every Member State. Where it exists, it is often limited to updating knowledge in their subject rather than discussing the latest developments in subject-related teaching methods. It also consists of organizing industrial placements for teachers with a view to opening their minds to the reality of the economic world.

2° The organization of education

71. **Increasing teaching staff** in some Member States, along with increasing their resources (suitable teaching materials), has enabled teachers to increase their availability with respect to their pupils as well as to improve their working conditions.

72. In flexible education systems, teachers have a certain degree of **autonomy** both in their teaching activities and in assessing their pupils (use of new assessment measures). This autonomy enables them to individualize their teaching and adapt to their pupils' rate of progress. Thus, in cycle-based teaching, teachers can make plans to lengthen or reduce the time spent by each pupil according to his or her individual pace.

73. The teacher is also fully autonomous in deciding how best to organize pupil **guidance**, where this is the teacher's responsibil-

ity. Teachers inform their pupils of the choices available with respect to courses of study or job opportunities, either in personal interviews or by organizing meetings with guidance specialists, representatives from industry, or study visits and temporary vocational placements.

74. Most of the Member States emphasize **close cooperation** between the teaching staff in a given school, and teachers are encouraged to become involved in team work. However, the relationship between teachers in vocational training and teachers in general education would not appear to be greatly encouraged.

3° Relations with the outside world

75. In those Member States where the teacher is a central figure in the education system, he or she plays an active role in shaping relations with:

- **the pupil's family**: for the most part it is the teacher who helps to involve the family in the schooling of their child and the search for suitable solutions to any difficulties that arise.

- **the environment**: the teacher acts as a coordinator and liaison with the extracurricular world, namely by organizing visits and industrial placements (initial contact, follow-up of the placement, etc.).

C. THE FAMILY

76. The Member States show a broad consensus by acknowledging the essential nature of parental involvement in the educational process and, hence, in the fight against school failure. In Member States where the school system is highly decentralized, a Parents' Charter institutionalizes their involvement by acknowledging their right to information (such as comparative data relating to pupil and school performance). The measures listed work in three directions:

77. - certain actions **take over from the family unit** when the accommodation, nutrition or health of the child is inadequate or deficient.

78. - other actions aim at **family participation** in school activities: teachers advise parents on ways of helping their children with their school work, especially reading; parents are introduced into their child's class where they have the opportunity to observe how the courses progress; special programmes help parents to stimulate reading in their child via workshops, reading material for children to take home, lending libraries for parents, library buses, reading corners in schools for parents, and home visits by the teacher to guide the parents. Furthermore, parents are included in the search for solutions to any learning difficulties their child may have.

79. - it should also be emphasized that the current trend in most Member States is to give parents a more active role in **the management of the school**, namely by means of collegial structures (school governing boards, etc.).

D. THE PUPIL

1° Teaching

80. A variety of teaching models can be used to overcome a pupils' learning difficulties, foster their personal development and further their schooling. This section will deal with teaching models to which most of the Member States implicitly or explicitly refer in their strategies to combat school failure, whether in the form of preventive or remedial measures.

81. **Teaching by ability grouping** provides education which is better suited to individual needs by enabling an accurate diagnosis of each pupil's learning difficulties.

82. **Differentiated teaching** is based on the principle that there is no single path to knowledge. This teaching model offers pupils a varied learning experience by adapting the methods used and adopting different approaches. It is accompanied by a formative assessment intended to guide pupils in their education by helping them to identify their difficulties and discover approaches likely to resolve their problems.

83. The basic postulate of **mastery learning** is that every pupil is capable of mastering the subjects in the school curriculum once he or she is placed in optimal learning conditions.

84. **Project method learning (or teaching by objectives)** is based on the principle that learning stems from activity. A project is conceived, planned and decided on by a group of pupils and their organizers. This model requires cooperation in the form of team work and an interdisciplinary approach to achieving set objectives. Moreover, it develops an active approach based on a constant interaction between theory and practice.

85. **Expressive and creative learning** is based on the same principle as project method learning, but the emphasis is placed on the creativity and free expression of the pupils.

2° Preventive measures

a) Detection of difficulties

86. During compulsory education, a more or less intense effort is made by most of the Member States to implement **measures for detecting difficulties** (medical, psychological and cognitive examinations). Early detection of learning difficulties facilitates efficient treatment and the setting up of suitable remedial measures. Depending on the Member State concerned, action is

taken by school psychologists, guidance counsellors, educational and psychological counselling centres or interdisciplinary teams comprised primarily of social workers.

b) Compensatory education measures

87. **During school hours**: generally speaking, support is provided by the subject teacher. This enables individualized teaching and the use of methods and tools which are better suited to the pace of the pupil experiencing difficulty. This support may be organized in homogeneous groups of pupils (e.g. to work on a specific subject) or heterogeneous groups (for interdisciplinary tasks), or on an individual basis.
To overcome a high rate of failure during transitional phases, emphasis is placed on providing stronger support to teaching at these times. One Member State has introduced remedial teachers in primary-level education.

88. **Outside school hours**: review sessions are organized in some Member States (at the initiative of the school, local authorities or voluntary associations) in order to review certain aspects of the day's or week's courses. Mention should also be made of the supervised study system - practically institutionalized in some Member States - in which a supervisor helps the pupil or groups of pupils to do their homework by making corrections, advising them or guiding them in their work.

89. **Tutoring** is one special approach that is adopted. There are two forms of tutoring which vary in efficiency depending on the Member State:

- **Tutoring by the teacher**: in Member States where the function of the teacher is imbued with a certain paternalism, the teacher plays a tutoring and guidance role for all the personal problems a pupil may have. Effective handling of these problems places considerable demands on the teacher's time.

- **Tutoring by another pupil**: in this system, one pupil is made responsible for teaching another, a role which enables him to influence his environment and encourages school success. This approach is little used, though it can be found at primary level to teach reading, and at secondary level in some schools.

90. By the same token, **information and self-help networks** are set up by pupils themselves to overcome learning difficulties.

c) Measures to encourage learning

91. **Alternating training**: all Member States feel that alternating training is suited to the aspirations of young people experiencing difficulty who reject traditional forms of education which, in their eyes, are too theoretical and abstract. Although it is taken to mean many different things in the various Member States, alternating training involves dividing the pupil's activity between school and industry. This type of approach is particularly valued as a means to adapt pupils to the working world and to

economic and social realities. Some Member States have made this the focal point of their education system.

92. **Project method teaching**: this covers a large number of structurally varied actions which all aim to encourage pupils experiencing difficulty and to motivate their learning by organizing and carrying out a project. Thus, in some schools, works contracts are concluded with companies and pupils are involved in their fulfilment. Mini-companies are set up by groups of pupils, which fosters their management capabilities and problem-solving skills. Special services are provided to the community, and simulated work experience is undertaken by some schools (corporate games, work projects in local communities, etc.).

d) Assessment

93. The implementation of a skills-based rather than knowledge-based assessment scheme using more suitable tools (modules, credit units, pupil profiles, achievement reports, etc.) more closely respects the individual learning pace of the pupil. Involving pupils in their self-assessment helps them to understand their problems better and adjust their learning accordingly.

e) Guidance

94. Guidance is an extremely important component in the pupil's plans, assuming he or she is making plans. Indeed, it is difficult for pupils to place themselves in a future context, especially when they are experiencing learning difficulties. This is why special attention is paid to this issue in most of the Member States.

3° Remedial measures

All Member States have a wide range of so-called remedial measures. Government programmes, involving several ministries and mobilizing a wide variety of social resources, have taken action in this area.

a) Remedial classes

Pupils with learning difficulties are placed in special classes for a time in order to overcome their difficulties or to be oriented towards another stream.

95. **Reception classes**: these are transition classes set up at the beginning of secondary education, bringing together pupils who have not satisfactorily completed the primary syllabus.

96. **Adjustment sections**: adjustment sections are used in primary education to provide assistance for children experiencing serious difficulties with reading, spelling or mathematics. Placement in these sections is always temporary.

97. **Pre-vocational classes organized according to ability** are set up in schools which take on pupils who have been unable to follow

their education normally due to learning difficulties, or who could not be oriented towards vocational training. Enhanced remedial measures, along with teaching by objectives and alternating training with industry have been introduced in order to improve instruction in these classes.

b) Remedial teaching

This covers a wide range of different measures depending on the difficulties targeted, the levels of education, and their duration.

98. Remedial actions using **modern tools** - such as computers - are organized to overcome existing difficulties with respect to basic knowledge which is considered essential by all Member States (language, mathematics).

99. In order to prepare pupils with learning difficulties to pass their examinations at the end of their schooling, concentrated efforts are made to give them adequate assistance both during the school year, by stimulating their motivation, and during the summer holidays, by means of remedial classes.

100. Assistance is generally provided during **transitional periods**.

101. Assistance is given by means of temporary teaching groups set up according to the needs of the pupils. This **temporary help** gives pupils experiencing learning difficulties the resources to continue their school career.

c) Mechanisms and educational approaches adopted

102. **Repeating**: repetition of a year is a means still used by some Member States to handle learning difficulties, although as a method it is much disparaged. Seen as a necessary evil, repeating has withstood numerous reform efforts. In those Member States which use it, legal provisions have been made to limit the number of repetitions allowed.

103. **Part-time education**: local experiments have set up simplified training structures specifically aimed at pupils facing school failure. In general, teaching is based on the principles of alternating training.

104. **General education measures**: this is an approach which aims not only to teach pupils but also to educate them. In this respect, it is appropriate for pupils faced with failure, making them aware of their responsibility for this situation by providing greater autonomy within the framework of projects which closely link the school, family and environment. Some schools which use this approach organize compensatory teaching groups offering remedial instruction to pupils with major learning difficulties. The curricula are adapted so that all pupils may achieve the minimum set objectives. During the holidays, the school offers activities bringing together families and teachers.

105. **Alternative education**: alternative schools apply approaches to teaching - as already mentioned above - which centre on the development of the child. Pupils confronted with failure in a traditional school system can find alternative education of this kind to be a suitable framework for developing their potential at their own pace.

106. **Alternating training**: this practice is becoming increasingly widespread in the Member States. It develops both the motivation of failing pupils and their knowledge within a more flexible and practice-oriented context (which is what most pupils suffering from the rigidity and overly theoretical character of the traditional system are generally looking for).

107. **Project tasks**: these tasks are centred on project method teaching. They have also been tried and tested with respect to remedial measures for pupils with learning difficulties. They promote the development of individual potential by giving pupils a direct influence on their environment together with increased responsibility. They most commonly take the form of cooperatives or mini-companies.

d) Assessment

108. Specific methods and tools are used to **foster the abilities of pupils with learning difficulties** and to develop their learning by enhancing their motivation. They ensure pupils' advancement by being adaptable to their pace (modules, credit units, etc.), and they allow for more personalised assessment.

e) Occupational integration

109. In all Member States we noted measures aimed at the occupational integration of young people facing school failure. These measures are used in both general and vocational education. Certain measures are the result of initiatives implemented by national authorities (**national programmes**), others arise from **purely local initiatives**, such as those launched by vocational training bodies, or from cooperative ventures between the school and external partners (local authorities, industry, etc.).
Some Member States award **financial incentives to companies** to encourage them to take charge of training young people who have fallen behind in their schooling (retard scolaire). The experiments undertaken aim not only to train pupils who are failing, but also to educate them in the broader sense of the word and to truly prepare them for social life. They all **highlight the value of industrial placements** as well as the close, profitable links which are created between schools and industry.

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